

NCA

VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5628
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MARCH 20, 1978

CHURCH AND STATE IN CROATIA

ANNCR:

THE CONSTITUTION OF YUGOSLAVIA GUARANTEES FREEDOM OF RELIGION. AND THIS PROVISION IS BEING CARRIED OUT IN THE LAWS OF ALL THE YUGOSLAV REPUBLICS. ON THURSDAY, MARCH 23, THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA IS EXPECTED TO PASS ITS LAW. CORRESPONDENT RON PERSTEIN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON RELIGION IN CROATIA.

VOICE:

ONE OF THE MOST NOTICEABLE FEATURES OF THE YUGOSLAV CITY OF ZAGREB IS ITS CHURCHES. UNLIKE THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY, WHICH IS DOMINATED BY ISLAM OR THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, ABOUT EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE BELIEVERS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA ARE ROMAN CATHOLICS. AND THE CHURCH IN CROATIA -- OF WHICH ZAGREB IS THE CAPITAL -- HAS ALWAYS PLAYED A STRONG ROLE IN THAT REPUBLIC'S IDENTITY.

IN NINETEEN FORTY-ONE, WHEN CROATIA BECAME AN INDEPENDENT STATE SUPPORTED BY NAZI GERMANY AND FASCIST ITALY, THE CHURCH COOPERATED WITH ITS STATE LEADERS. THAT STAND CAUSED PROBLEMS WHEN THE COMMUNISTS TOOK OVER AFTER THE WAR. THE POLITICAL TENSIONS, FANNED BY THE ANTI-RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE OF THE COMMUNISTS IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD, LED TO YEARS OF MISTRUST. IT WAS NOT UNTIL YUGOSLAVIA AND THE VATICAN RE-ESTABLISHED RELATIONS IN NINETEEN SEVENTY THAT A NORMAL RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST AUTHORITIES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF CROATIA.

CROATIA THE LONGEST TIME -- FOUR YEARS -- TO DRAFT A LAW.

THE LEGISLATORS CARRIED OUT THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION'S GUARANTEES FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN THE DRAFT LAW. BUT THEY ALSO REGULATED SUCH ACTIVITIES AS PRINTING, THE USE OF CHURCH BUILDINGS, AND THE LEGAL STATUS FOR CHURCH EMPLOYEES. THE CHURCH, WHILE COMMENDING THE POLITICIANS FOR A POSITIVE ATTITUDE, OBJECTED TO THE LIMITS ON THEIR ACTIVITIES ENVISIONED IN THE LAW.

THEY WOULD LIKE ACCESS TO THE MASS MEDIA WHICH HAS ALWAYS BEEN DENIED THEM IN THE PAST.

THE CROATIAN CHURCH PUBLICATION, GLAS KONCILA, COMMENTED: "OUR POLITICAL LEADERS STILL RETAIN -- CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT -- THE SUSPICION THAT RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES ARE A POTENTIAL DANGER TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIALIST SOCIETY, THAT THEY MIGHT EASILY BE MISUSED FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND THAT THE ENEMY MIGHT BE CONCEALED WITHIN THEM." BUT THE CROATIAN LEGISLATURE HAS TAKEN SOME, IF NOT ALL, OF THE CHURCH'S SUGGESTIONS IN PUTTING TOGETHER THE FINAL LAW. THE DIALOGUE DOES NOT LEAVE THE CHURCH LEADERS IN CROATIA TOTALLY SATISFIED. BUT IT DOES LEAVE CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN THEIR WARMEST STAGE IN DECADES.

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